

## BUSINESS OF MONTH / PETERANDPAULS.COM ADDS HONEY

## IN PURSUIT OF SWEET SUCCESS

BY PATRICK MANGION

Although he holds a stable of companies, including several posh banquet halls in Vaughan and a thriving gift basket business, right now, Peter Eliopoulos is excited about honey.

"It's my father's recipe," he said, clasping the tips of his pinkie and index fingers together as a testament to the savoury condiment simply named My Father's Honey.

But bottled honey aside, Mr. Eliopoulos, 50, and his wife, Anna, are better known as the team behind byPeterandPauls.com — a \$20-million-a-year Vaughan-based entertainment company.

With 11 different businesses in the fold, the company has become synonymous with York Region's event venues.

"They're the kings of catering and event planning," said Frank Miele, economic development commissioner for the City of Vaughan. "Everything they touch turns to gold."

Beyond the success of The Bellagio and Paramount, the company has a DJ service, advertising firm, juice bars and photography service.

"You've got to have passion," Mr. Eliopoulos said. "This isn't work to me. It's fun."

In more than 23 years in business, there have been more than 59,500 parties attended by 5.3 million guests.

Sporting his trademark ponytail and black-on-black apparel, Mr. Eliopoulos can only offer a grin while reflecting on how it all began.

It all started with bored Greek teenagers in the Toronto neighbourhood where he grew up.

"There wasn't much to do," he said. "There would be Greek association dances. I figured, if they're doing it, I'll print some tickets and hold some get-togethers."

Soon, the aptly named Young Greek Get Togethers had become Peter E Get Togethers and finally Elio Productions.

Before his 17th birthday, he had found a winning formula.

His parents tried to steer him away from the entertainment industry.

"They wanted me to go to school and get a good job," he said, adding, "School wasn't for me."

They were even less enthusiastic about his aspirations of becoming a rock star, photographer or model, Mr. Eliopoulos



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

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laughed.

He would complete the business program at Seneca College, saying the most he learned was how to give correct change and improve his typing.

At his peak, Mr. Eliopoulos had thousands invested in a downtown Toronto

party that was to be headlined by Kool and the Gang.

Taking losses on past events had taught him a lesson, so rather than push forward with what would have been his crowning entertainment achievement, he backed away when the Toronto event had grown

into an unwieldy logistical headache.

"He probably would have kept doing it if that had worked out," Mrs. Eliopoulos said.

From the very start, Peter and Anna were not just life partners, but business partners.

The two were introduced by a mutual friend. Mr. Eliopoulos, a brash 21-year-old and she a 16-year-old shrinking violet. Less than three years later, they were married.

Today, they have three daughters, Katherine, Angela and Nicole, all in their 20s. Two have shown an interest in carrying on the family business tradition.

Simple as it may sound, compromise has been the key to their 27-year marriage and business partnership.

They started with a bakery at Steeles Avenue and Keele Street, straddling the York Region-Toronto border. It was owned by a man named Paul, whose name was folded into that of the business.

From there, they managed Wincott, a family restaurant.

Mrs. Eliopoulos would open at 6 a.m., with daughter Katherine, an infant at the time, in tow.

Mr. Eliopoulos would arrive by noon to take over.

While Nikkos, with its Mediterranean-inspired fare, is included in their portfolio, the company's focus has shifted away from the restaurant business.

Anna's focus is the burgeoning gift basket and corporate gift business, while Peter dabbles in his varying ventures, each with its own independent management structure.

Being free of all the day-to-day operations allows him to continue looking past the horizon at new possibilities.

"They're the ultimate self-made entrepreneurs," Mr. Miele said. "They've never taken a cookie-cutter approach. Everything they do is unique."

But despite carving out what has been a very successful niche entertaining others, Mr. and Mrs. Eliopoulos remain modest.

Mr. Eliopoulos simply waves a dismissive hand when asked for his preferred title; president or chief executive?

He still considers himself the same teen who realized a dream to make money by showing people a good time.

"I'm the creative director," he replied.

But he won't delve into the specifics of his latest project, other than to say it's a destination spot that smacks of a luxury resort.

"You'll see," he said.

For more information visit [www.bypeterandpauls.com](http://www.bypeterandpauls.com)

## BUILDING AN EMPIRE

The PeterandPauls group includes:

▶ **TABLETALK:** a catering and special events company

▶ **PARAMOUNT:** a newly opened Woodbridge-based conference and event venue able to accommodate up to

1,650 guests

▶ **THE MANOR:** on the grounds of Carrying Place golf and country club in Kettleby, the 34,000-square-foot facility boasts three banquet halls

▶ **PETER & PAUL'S BASKETS AND**

**GIFTS:** one of the fastest growing segments of their business, the company fills order in the thousands for corporate clients, weddings and holiday gifts

▶ **DELANO:** A restaurant/event venue providing a more casual atmosphere

▶ **326 PUMP:** a juice bar located in Extreme Fitness also offering a variety of healthy foods

▶ **NIKKOS:** a European-inspired restaurant with Mediterranean fare

▶ **S4:** the company's entertainment

and DJ service able to customize each project

▶ **COLELLI STUDIOS:** offering on-site photography service for any event; and

▶ **SEARCH ENGINE:** the company's own advertising and design service.

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